

California Biodiversity Council Regional Meeting

June 9, 1999

Eagles Hall
Ft. Bragg, California

MINUTES

Members Present:

- Mary D. Nichols (Chair), Resources Agency
- Patrick Wright, Resources Agency
- Andrea E. Tuttle, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
- Robert Hight, Department of Fish and Game
- Al Wright, Bureau of Land Management
- Nancy Huffman, Northern California Counties Association
- David French, Regional Council of Rural Counties
- Rick Rayburn, Department of Parks and Recreation
- Brad Powell, USDA Forest Service
- Vanessa Arellano, Department of Food and Agriculture
- Paul Thayer, State Lands Commission
- Pat Meehan, Department of Conservation
- Bill Vance, California Environmental Protection Agency
- William Ahern, State Coastal Conservancy
- John Dixon, California Coastal Commission
- Brian Smith, California Department of Transportation
- Alex Glazer, University of California
- Bob Haussler, California Energy Commission
- Jim Shevock, National Park Service
- Jeffrey Vonk, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- John Engbring, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Frank Michny, Bureau of Reclamation
- Chris Heppe, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Mike Shulters, U.S. Geological Survey
- Debbie Maxwell, USGS Biological Resources
- Joseph Blum, National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA
- Colonel Dave Linnebur, U.S. Marine Corps
- Paul Stein, Sacramento-Mother Lode Regional Association of California Counties
- Thomas Wehri, California Association of Resource Conservation Districts
- Jerry Harmon, San Diego Association of Governments
- Doug Balmain, San Joaquin Valley Regional Association of California Counties
- David Colfax, North Coastal Counties Supervisors Association
- Randy Brown, Department of Water Resources
- Nina Gordon, California Conservation Corps

Announcements

David Colfax, Mendocino County Fifth District Supervisor—acknowledged the many people in the audience who work very hard, often unpaid, to address the watershed and fisheries issues the Council is addressing at this meeting.

Al Wright—Announced the recent completion of the acquisition of the Headwaters Forest by the state and federal governments. He indicated that the Bureau of Land Management and the Department of Fish and Game will be the lead federal and state agencies for the management of this new public acquisition.

Council Executive Committee Report

Carl Rountree, Executive Committee chair, explained the Executive Committee is working to modify the Council's workplan to reflect the Council's new emphasis on watersheds. Letters have been sent to the State Water Resources Control Board and the California Coastal Conservancy, inviting them to become members of the Council. The Executive Committee is looking for an appropriate agency to bring an economics focus to the Council.

Members' dues are payable in July. These funds are used to support Council meetings and to print the Council's newsletter, Biodiversity News. The October Council meeting is to be a joint meeting with the Regional Council of Rural Counties and will be held at Granlibakken at Lake Tahoe. The March 2000 meeting is slated for the Colorado Desert region of California.

Report on Statewide Watershed Planning Activities

Maria Rea, Resources Agency, provided a handout that described the watershed working group's recommendations and suggested next steps. It also provided a set of general watershed principles, a list of discussion themes from the working group, and a list of watershed topics considered in a work group priority-setting exercise.

Bill Stewart, CDF Fire and Resource Assessment Program, gave a presentation on the types of watershed data being collected for landowner, professional, agency, and public availability and use. Data and assessments could be integrated to create a high quality atlas of baseline data and maps. Baseline data needs to be collected to a common standard across all ownerships. Such data could be used to develop models of watershed conditions and to identify and set priorities for areas needing treatment.

Secretary Nichols then lead a discussion of the watershed principles that were put forward by the watershed working group. The Council accepted the principles.

Report from Coastal Salmon Outreach Meeting

Tom Weseloh, North Coast Manager for Cal Trout, gave a presentation on the serious problem of barriers to salmon passage that prevent these fish from moving down- or up-stream during their natural migration patterns. Agency reports document this problem throughout the range of salmonids in California. Passage problems (such as improperly placed culverts) need to be identified, set priorities for action, fix the problems, and monitor the results. Several counties, including Humboldt and Santa Cruz, have made progress in addressing salmon barriers.

Addressing salmon passage problems should be one of the highest priorities for the CBC and its member agencies.

Maria Rea, Resources Agency, provided an update on the status of a potential increase in salmon restoration funding from the federal government. The President's budget contained \$100 million for the states of California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska. These states, however, are requesting a higher funding level--\$200 million per year for six years. If the program is funded at the President's budget level, California could expect \$22-23 million. Program implementation would emphasize leadership of local government, implementation of the goals of the federal Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act, and local efforts. The new state budget has 15 positions to support implementation of the federal grant program, if it is enacted in the federal budget in order to ensure that contracts are let and projects are implemented as quickly as possible. The new state budget also provides funding for coastal salmon watershed work, including county efforts, science, data, and assessment. An additional \$6.8 million and many positions are provided to the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, Fish and Game, Division of Mines and Geology, and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to support timber harvesting plan review and oversight.

Local Watershed Needs and Salmon Protection efforts: Panel Discussion of Local Needs, Experiences, and Programs

Mark Hite, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and David Cox, Mendocino County Supervisor, moderated the panel.

Dean Cromwell, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and Rick Macedo, Department of Fish and Game, reported on assessment work on the Noyo River watershed. This joint DFG-CDF effort integrates the approach of the DFG watershed assessment manual with a prototype CDF GIS-based model. The goal of this assessment process is to determine sound methods for rapid watershed assessment for fish and their habitat that will better identify problems and point the way to appropriate mitigation measures. An important use of this assessment process could be in the timber harvesting plan (THP) development and review processes. The use of different data and assessment processes, and the existence of different perspectives, has made effective communication very challenging in the THP review process. The Noyo watershed assessment attempts to lay out clearly all data, assumptions, and assessment for any interested party to review. The assessment indicated that excess sediment, temperature, and lack of large woody debris, were likely limiting factors in the Noyo watershed. The National Marine Fisheries Service needs to be included in the discussion of this assessment approach.

Don Tuttle, Humboldt County Public Works, made a presentation on the efforts of the five northwestern California counties—Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Siskiyou, and Trinity, to respond to the salmonid listings. Each county passed resolutions committing staff time to the effort. Initial funding from the Resources Agency helped to get the program started. The counties gathered 30 fisheries biologists in a meeting to help identify priority salmonid needs for the counties' area of over 10 million acres. Up to \$230 million of salmonid improvement was identified. The counties contracted with the University of California for a report, now completed, on the effects of county land use regulations and management on salmonids and their habitat. The report showed the work needed to revise county general plans, resource protection standards, etc., in order to improve salmonid protection. During the first 18 months of their

efforts, the counties raised over \$1.5 million in grant monies, including funds from DFG's SB271 program, For the Sake of Salmon, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Greater simplicity is needed in processes grant monies to reduce administrative costs and get the money to the ground sooner. Entire seasons of work can be lost due to administrative delays in processing grant funds.

Mary Pjerrou, Redwood Coast Watershed Alliance, provided a stakeholder view of watersheds and timber harvest on the North Coast. The Alliance is the only Mendocino County group to regularly review THPs and cumulative impact assessments. The Mendocino Redwood Company (MRC) lands have average stocking levels of 7-8 thousand board feet (MBF) per acre. The Georgia Pacific lands are better stocked (10 MBF/acre). The former Coastal Forestlands Limited lands (3-4MBF/acre) are so depleted that the owners are now looking to convert them to vineyards. In the 1980s, the Alliance recognized how depleted the local forestlands were and asked for new forest practice rules. In the early 1990s, they were given "bogus" sustained yield plan (SYP) rules. There is severe damage resulting from harvesting—loss of coho, potential loss of steelhead—and government laws and enforcement have failed to protect these species. State and federal agencies should be shutting down logging.

Discussants, CBC Dialogue and Summation: How to Build off of Local Watershed and Salmon Protection Efforts with New Federal Funds

Tom Schott, Mendocino County Resource Conservation District, said that groups interested in collection and integration of data could help to make cumulative effects analysis more than just a rote exercise. Landowners need to be involved at the operational level. We need to actively demonstrate that agencies are working together—whether it's data collection, funding projects, or making permitting processes work. From the local perspective, court-imposed deadlines can be a hindrance because they cause problems for collecting data and doing good science. Agencies should closely look at their administrative processes in grant contracting and the costs that these can impose on groups.

Mel Kreb, California Conservation Corps (CCC), explained that the goal of the CCC is to help young adults learn responsibility and self-respect through meaningful work. Seventy thousand young adults provide a successful model for California's environment. The CCC builds relationships with private landowners and respects landowners' performance expectations and property rights. The CCC manages the federally supported Americorps Conservation Stewards Program. The CCC services are available to any watershed groups that want help with restoration, monitoring, etc.

Craig Bell, Salmonid Restoration Federation, stressed that without protection of habitat, we cannot bring back the fish. Local watershed groups need support, but agencies should not fund groups that are not all inclusive. There should be continued funding for the work of the CCC and Americorps programs.

Secretary Nichols asked the Council members for a discussion of next steps for the Council in the watershed and salmonids area. Government agencies can be a part of the problem or a part of the solution and that the agencies can do better.

Al Wright, Bureau of Land Management, commented that he was excited to see the progress that the counties have made over the past few years. There has not been a successful forum to address these resource issues in the northwest part of the state. There is a need to pull together federal, state, and local agencies to provide a focus and set priorities on these issues, and produce a collaborative outcome.

Secretary Nichols said that she would nominate a leadership team to start working on the issues discussed today and to draft a charter for their efforts. Bureau of Land Management, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, the National Marine Fisheries Service, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Fish and Game, and the Forest Service should be involved. Maria Rea would lead the effort. The purpose is to better deliver on collective programs and policies, and better interact with local watershed organizations, RCDs, agriculture and timber representatives on policies on funding, watersheds, etc.

Conservation Needs Assessment Panel

Secretary Nichols noted that funding is being provided to the Resources Agency (current year budget is \$250,000) to prioritize where the state should invest its conservation and acquisition funds.

Susan Cochrane, Department of Fish and Game, discussed how to set a statewide framework for conservation of a reserved and working landscape. Two recent Los Angeles Times editorials have requested the state play a lead role in setting conservation priorities. This task is the bringing together of multiple statewide databases on many different resources and the development of statewide perspectives and priorities for conserving these resources, as well as tools that local parties can use. We need good information for guiding the allocation of statewide planning, conservation, and acquisition resources.

The structure for the development of resource assessment and stewardship strategies should include a Steering Committee. A Science Assessment Team and a Stewardship Implementation Team assist this committee. The Steering Committee must be responsive to the needs of the users of the assessment and stewardship strategies. The envisioned process will be a consensus-based effort to develop a set of policy and strategy recommendations to state government to protect biodiversity by conserving our natural and working landscapes. Some outputs are planned by fall of 2000. The Council members should designate point people, provide information, help with funding and staffing, and seek inclusion of conservation measures in the major infrastructure bond act currently being developed in the state.

Julia McIver, California Coastal Conservancy, described how her agency works at the local level, in a nonregulatory fashion, to accomplish resource conservation goals. As an example, the Navarro River assessment and conservation strategy was started in 1995. The effort has involved a wide range of agency participants and local stakeholders. The group chose fish as the indicator species for watershed health. They identified and mapped priority sub-basins and needed restoration measures. There were four lessons from the group's experience: achieving a fine enough level of data resolution to support decisions is important; plan development is an iterative process; this iterative process is responsive to the community; and keep your eyes on the prize.

Connie Best, Partnership for Rebuilding Forest Ecosystem Wealth, emphasized that ecosystem health and economic health can be synergistic, not antagonistic. The Partnership holds easements on 14,000 acres of lands, mostly in Mendocino County. Forty four percent of California forestlands are in private ownership and that this private forest landscape provides crucial public resources. On the North Coast, about 90 percent of forestlands are privately held. There is no guarantee that private forests will be preserved, given threats from population growth, sprawling development, and ecological degradation. Ms. Best reviewed indicators for ecosystem health on private lands, raised the question of how to rebuild, and noted that federal, state, and local regulations set minimum standards for forest management.

Incentives are needed to reward excellence in private forestland management. Incentives include:

- Education and technical assistance;
- Cost shares for conservation and restoration;
- Financial and tax benefits;
- Development of markets for nontimber forest products;
- Recognition of best practices.

Many of these tools already exist, however there is a need for improvements:

- Expand the availability and ease in receiving technical assistance;
- Increase cost share funding for conservation and restoration;
- Expand the availability of restoration funding to smaller forest landowners;
- Expand and fully fund the Forest Legacy Program to acquire conservation easements, including the broader application of these to working landscapes;
- Provide state tax credits to promote the charitable donation of easements;
- Provide tax credits for the cost of habitat restoration, road removal, and similar activities.

Rondal Snodgrass, Sanctuary Forest, stated that the people on the North Coast all love the land, but they do not all love it in the same way. The upper Mattole River could be a model. Legislator Virginia Strom-Martin was asked to help call together all the local players, and was the beginning of the cooperative agreement they have today. Gender balance has been an important part of this process. The Bureau of Land Management encouraged its regional director to reach out to nonprofits, and not just respond to them. The Sanctuary Forest and other nonprofit organizations need to recognize that they are committed to the same public trust as are government agencies. Agencies and nonprofits must be able to admit mistakes in order to maintain trust. Participants in the Sanctuary Forest include the Wildlife Conservation Board, Department of Fish and Game, Coastal Conservancy, Department of Parks and Recreation, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Save the Redwoods League, and others. The Department of Parks and Recreation and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection have a hard time with partnerships, such as Sanctuary Forest. Agency managers should give their staffs the latitude to be creative. Senate Bill 271 electrified the restoration movement by providing funding directly to nonprofits who can do great things.

Nancy Barth, Mendocino Planning Commission, described the composition of the planning commission and its role, noting that it is largely a reactive body. Planning commissions can be more proactive, as demonstrated by four gravel mining permits on the Eel River that the county

administers. The county had all four permits come up for renewal at the same time, giving the county a better ability to assess the cumulative impacts of the four permits. The county recently adopted an ordinance for the operation of portable lumber mills. The county sought help and technical data from mill owners during the process, such that the final ordinance passed with only minor technical changes and the mill owners thanked the planning commission for a job well done. Mendocino County still needs a grading ordinance, as well as oak woodland preservation. The real threat to the land is residential subdivision, which leads to a complete loss of resource contributions to the economy.

John Gamper, California Farm Bureau, focused on the strengths and weaknesses of agricultural conservation easements. The strengths are:

- voluntary and monetary benefit to the landowner;
- windfall/wipeout effects of being inside/outside the designated urban growth boundary;
- property and income tax relief;
- stabilize land value by stripping off parcels' speculative value;
- secure the speculative value of land without having to seek permits;
- flexible easement can be written to meet the needs and interests of landowners and their decedents.

The weaknesses to conservation easements are:

- a lack of funding to use them widely;
- perpetual deed restrictions can scare landowners, especially where surrounding landowners do not have similar restrictions.

Secretary Nichols closed the panel by noting that the Conservation Needs Assessment Panel had been for the Council's information and no action was requested.

During the brief remainder of the Council meeting, an open forum was held, during which people who had signed up were given the opportunity to briefly address the Council.

The Council meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM.